

Planning Meetings for People With Disabilities

Accommodation/Awareness Considerations

The Greater Kansas City Federal Executive Board's Disabled Federal Employee Council (DFEC) has prepared this document as an educational tool for people who plan meetings. Our objective is to help meeting planners learn about People With Disabilities, and what special accommodations are. Definitions from the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) are provided along with specific examples to help meeting planners understand what they can do to accommodate People With Disabilities who participate in meetings. For more information please visit the ADA website at: <http://www.ada.gov>

“Consider the person with a disability!”

DEFINITIONS:

Disability:

Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as hearing, seeing, speaking, thinking, walking, breathing, or performing manual tasks.

Reasonable accommodation:

Reasonable accommodation is defined as any change or adjustment to the way things usually are done that would allow people to enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals. Often the term “undue burden” is talked about with reasonable accommodation.

Undue burden:

Undue burden is defined as significant difficulty or expense. Typically, Federal Agencies have the resources to provide reasonable accommodations when the right people are contacted for help. Remember to contact local resources for help providing accommodations.

ASK PEOPLE WHAT THEY NEED – GIVE THEM TIME TO RESPOND:

Meeting planners can only provide reasonable accommodation when it is requested. Announcements that tell potential attendees that reasonable accommodations are available will help open communications with People With Disabilities. The Department of Transportation Disability Resource Center suggests using the following paragraph in announcements:

“We are committed to providing equal access to this meeting for all participants. If you need alternative formats or other reasonable accommodations, please contact (name of person) at (number) or via email: (email address here) with your request by close of business, (deadline).”

WHERE TO GET HELP:

If a person with a disability requests, but cannot suggest, an appropriate accommodation, the meeting planner should work closely with the individual requesting accommodation and their manager/supervisor to identify one. Use the employee's local agency resources. There are many public and private resources that can provide assistance without cost. The Internet is also a good place to learn more about disabilities and special accommodations.

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MEETING LOCATION:

1. Public facilities must meet ADA laws. Government facilities must meet Rehabilitation Act laws. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Consistency to/from parking spaces, entry/egress for the building, hallways, restrooms, break areas, and meeting rooms (all these are necessary not just one of them)
 - Meeting rooms must have proper spacing between doorways, rows, tables, etc.
 - Meeting room size must be large enough to accommodate the number of people in attendance and their equipment. (Wheelchairs, walkers, and other assistive equipment people use)
 - Meeting rooms should be in a quiet location without background noise and/or poor acoustics.
2. Is there public transportation available to and from the location?
Plan your event around the transportation schedule.
3. How many handicap accessible parking spaces are available?
If additional people need handicap accessible parking will this facility reserve spaces for them before they arrive?
4. Evaluate the parking areas. Look for hills or steps that would make it difficult for people to get in and out of the facility.
5. Look at the sidewalks leading into the facility. Ensure they are wide enough and have appropriate ramps that provide accessibility for manual/power wheelchairs or scooters.
6. Check the doors to the facility to ensure proper width. If there are automatic openers are they handicap accessible? (E.G. Entryways are 38" or wider, and have ramp or elevator access to all meeting areas for participants who use manual/power wheelchairs or scooters)
7. Inside the facility are the hallways and doors wide enough to accommodate people in manual/power wheelchairs, etc?
8. Are restrooms fully accessible for men and women? (Wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, etc.)
9. If there will be breakout rooms or break areas for refreshment they must equally accommodate your guests.
10. For all day events where guests will be responsible for meals make sure the facility is located in close proximity to eating establishments that are ADA compliant. (Consider providing a list of locations for your guests.)
11. If an event is longer than one day and lodging arrangements are required make sure the lodging you arrange meets accessibility requirements. Make sure the location chosen for lodging has the correct number of ADA rooms or have ADA Room Kits available for the guests. Check to ensure these items are in working order. (See items 2 thru 8 and 10 above)

INVITATIONS TO MEETINGS:

1. Publish your invitations a minimum of 30 days before the event (60 days when possible).
2. Provide the name of the person who will help arrange special accommodations for attendees. Use the example paragraph on page one under "Ask people what they need – give them time to respond". Provide attendees a contact name, telephone number, e-mail address and a deadline to submit their request for special accommodation. (This will provide adequate time for the Special Accommodations Coordinator or Meeting Planner to facilitate the special accommodation requests.)
3. State a cutoff date for all registrations. (This will provide adequate time for the Meeting Planner to make all the arrangements necessary for the event.)

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REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS:

This includes but is not limited to:

1. Parking
2. Provide the agenda, minutes, visual aids and other handouts in alternative formats (Braille, large print, computer disks, CD, etc. that are Section 508 compliant). When possible these may be helpful before your meeting.
3. Sign Language Interpreter (Make sure to ask what kind of Sign Language Interpreter is needed by the person making the request.) – Depending on the length of your meeting you may need more than one interpreter. There is a cost associated with this accommodation. Make funds available for this accommodation include this expense in the program cost. Contact the agency or other community resources when necessary.
4. Ensure that assistive listening devices are available and are in working order.
5. Provide people to assist guests who request help. This may include helping them get in and out of the facility, seating, etc. You can provide ushers or have committee members and/or other volunteers available to help when needed.
6. Provide bags for people to carry the handouts in and out of the meeting.
7. Provide basic water accommodations. This may be a pitcher of water and glasses or bottled water.
8. When providing meals ask people what their dietary needs are.

SETUP THE MEETING ROOM:

1. Wheelchair access requires aisles between chairs to be a minimum of 38".
2. Wheelchair access requires meeting room tables to be a minimum of 36" high.
3. Remove chairs from various locations in the set up to ensure dispersed seating for participants who use wheelchairs.
4. If a presenter has a physical disability provide a ramp to the platform and podium.
5. Leave space in the front of the room, near the podium or primary speaking area, for sign language interpreters. Reserve seating near the interpreters for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing.
6. When a phone is available to participants, ensure that it is hearing aid compatible and/or it has an amplifier. Also, a teletypewriter (TTY) should be available to participants who are deaf.
7. When a participant brings a guide dog, offer a bowl of water and provide directions to where the dog can be walked to relieve himself.

DURING THE MEETING:

1. Have an agenda and provide it ahead of time. This will allow people to bring what they need for the event.
2. Be considerate of the length of time each session will be. When possible try not to plan sessions longer than 1 hour without a break.
3. Plan adequate time for breaks and stick to them.
4. When audio/visual aids such as Microsoft PowerPoint slides are used in a presentation they can be provided to attendees as an accommodation. In this case they should be Section 508 compliant.

Sources: <http://www.ada.gov> and <http://www.drc.dot.gov>